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### An Ethnography of Parking Customs and Status at Parkland College

At Parkland College parking is free and available on a first-come basis. However, it is always hard to find a good parking spot no matter where one may drive. The lack of parking spots at our community college is an issue for all students because it can lead to students being late for class which can result in a grade deduction. For that reason, my class research group and I decided to look into the way cars are parked and what those cars say about the driver. Through this ethnography project each of the group members interviewed one person and asked them a series of questions having to do with the way the interviewee parks, what they think of other people's parking, and how the way a particular brand or condition of a car resembles the driver. While I was conducting my interview I also used participant observation as part of my methods. By doing so I was able to examine the interviewee's body language which allowed me to better understand how much the interviewee cares about the interview topic of parking customs on campus. I was also able to set up my questions as a friendly conversation with the interviewee, avoided awkwardness, and established rapport. I feel like the interview was less stressful and relaxed due to the fact that both the person I interviewed and myself were Parkland students. Being able to say that I was also a student, experiencing the same issues when it comes to parking, provided a sense of unity that made for a smooth interview.

As a group we had similar answers from the people we interviewed. The most important conclusion I reached from my interview is that both bigger and newer cars are more likely to

take up two spaces; the first because they are simply too big to park in one space, and new expensive cars because their drivers want to protect them from being hit. With that being the case my interviewee suggested that those drivers with bigger cars should be considerate enough and park in the spots further away from the building in order to allow more drivers to park closer to the building. Also if drivers are worried about their new car being hit then they too should park in the spots away from the building. Again this will allow more drivers to park closer to the building resulting in students being happier because they did not have to run from their car to class.

The data collected in this ethnography relates to socioeconomic status, when talking about the brand or condition of cars that are poorly parked. According to the text book *Applying Cultural Anthropology: An Introductory Reader*, social status is “a person’s level of prestige in society. Social status is associated with factors like education and employment as with higher and lower levels of wealth or power” (Podolefsky 2013: G-8). In the United States we have this concept that if someone drives a nice car or wears nice clothes that they are wealthy. So when we are talking about the way that new nice brand cars are parked we assume that the driver has money, which gives them a higher social status. From our interviews and the personal experiences of our group members we believe that this idea of a higher status can lead the driver to think that they can do whatever they want, like taking two parking spaces, because they feel like their car is better than other cars. This idea is similar to ethnocentrism, an anthropology concept which we read about in the article “Understanding Humans and Human Problems”. According to the article “this universal tendency to prejudice based on the supposed superiority of one’s group, called ethnocentrism, is something everyone should avoid” (Podolefsky 2013: 2). Though ethnocentrism should be avoided it is something that occurs every day. If more people

are aware of this concept then perhaps people can be considerate of others even if they are not part of the same group. For example, if more people were aware of avoiding ethnocentrism or feeling superior to others then maybe a driver with a nice car would not take up two spaces close to the building because they would think of all the people who would be inconvenienced. We also cannot forget how the drivers who always park correctly are not going to accept the way other drivers park incorrectly, especially if the drivers parking incorrectly are doing so because of feelings of superiority. This reminded me of David Crawford's article "Globalization from the Ground Up" in which he presents a theory for conflict in our globalized world in which "communities are not being fused into a single global culture, but instead they consolidate into large cultural blocs" (Crawford 2013: 292). I think that drivers parking correctly and incorrectly at Parkland are examples of these cultural blocs that are keeping our community from becoming a single culture. Some people may not think about the way people park in so much detail but the truth is the way a car is parked does say something about the driver.

This ethnography has made me think of things differently. Every time I would pass a parking space where a car was parked incorrectly, it would frustrate me because I would have to continue looking for a spot to park. However, I never thought about what was being said about the driver until I began this project. Being able to interview other students, who experienced the same problem on a daily basis, furthered my hypothesis that the social status of drivers correspond to the way particular cars are parked and confirmed what my group had thought that this is an important topic that needs to be discussed. If I were able to continue researching this topic I would add more questions to my interviews. A few would include; what could Parkland do to help with the issue of parking? Is it mostly males or females who park incorrectly? Lastly, how many times were people marked off for being late to class, due to lack of parking?

## Bibliography

- Crawford, David. "Globalization from the Ground Up." *Applying Cultural Anthropology: An Introductory Reader*. By Aaron Podolefsky, Peter J. Brown, and Scott M. Lacy. 9th ed. New York: McGraw-Hill Higher Education, 2013. 289-94. Print.
- Podolefsky, Aaron, Peter J. Brown, and Scott M. Lacy. "Introduction: Understanding Humans and Human Problems." *Applying Cultural Anthropology: An Introductory Reader*. 9th ed. New York: McGraw-Hill Higher Education, 2013. 1-4. Print.